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ON THE CAUSES OF SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION.

FROM AN ESSAY BY JAMES OVERTON, M.D. OF NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

The observations which have been hitherto collected in relation to this subject, seem to result in the firm conviction that a very large proportion of those who have suffered from spontaneous combustion, have been addicted to the abusive use of spirituous drinks. From this fact it has been concluded by some, and especially by Mr. Lair, that the different parts of their bodies having undergone a considerable alcoholic impregnation, had thereby contracted a high degree of combustibility, and consequently were easily ignited by the agency of any inflammable cause. This opinion appears to have enjoyed a very general and protracted acceptance among the profession, as well as with the mass of mankind, not accustomed to the investigations of abstruse physical and medical questions.

The opinion, indeed, derives apparent confirmation from the facts disclosed by the *post-mortem* examination of the bodies of persons who have died during a paroxysm of inebriation from ardent spirit. The different portions of their bodies have been found to exhale a strong alcoholic odor. And Mr. Lair also remarks, in confirmation of this explication, that the flame observed in combustions of this nature, resembles very accurately in its appearance, that of alcohol in a state of inflammation, and that the individuals in whom this accident has most frequently occurred are very fat or very lean persons, and that in the first case the abundance of fat has furnished aliment to the flame, whilst in the second, the defect of humidity was favorable to the progression and continued combustion of its elements present in the body of the sufferer. It is asserted, however, that this explication, notwithstanding its great popularity and useful moral tendency, is illy in accord with the settled principles of sound physiology; which refuses to admit the assimilation of any substance whatever into the living system, without important changes in the elements of its constitution. Among the constituent principles of every substance submitted to the action of the living organism, a new state of things is always induced; present combinations are dissolved, and new ones established. This faculty peculiar to vitality, may, it is true, be modified or limited by the condition of disease, or other anormal states of the system, but does not allow of entire suspension until after death. We are led, indeed, to regard as characteristic of organic vital action, its power of forming bodies more complex in their constitution than those which are the product of inorganic nature. This action often modifies the character of bodies which are extrinsic to the living organ, and produces bodies which, until the present time, chemists have regarded as submissive to no further decomposition. As an example of this fact, among many others, it has been noticed that the cones of the pine tree which has grown upon sterile land, and in which not a particle of calcareous matter could be detected by chemical tests, have, notwithstanding, furnished chalk to the analysis of the chemist. And other earths are often found in vegetables growing upon soils which possess nothing of a similar nature in their composition.

These and numberless other analogous facts establish, beyond the reach of question, the immense authority exercised by vital functions over the laws of composition which obtain in relation to inorganic nature. But although this authority is palpably very great, it is not absolute or entire in its influence. In proof of this idea, it has been ascertained that certain substances assimilated by the living body, retain notwithstanding some of their primitive qualities ; such as their color, their odor, &c. &c. We know, for example, that madder taken into the stomach of animals, dyes the bones red ; that a decoction of Campeache wood communicates its color to the urine ; and that rhubarb gives to the urine, when taken into the stomach under some circumstances, a very yellow tint, in some instances greatly resembling, in appearance, water colored by the admixture of a considerable portion of venous blood. It is also said that agaric, a fermenting drink with which the Kamschatkadales often make themselves drunk, communicates its intoxicating quality to their urine. Garlic communicates its odor and taste to the milk of cows, and even frictions with this article give its peculiar odor to the breath and cutaneous excretion. Turpentine, asparagus, and other vegetable substances, also impress upon the secretions their peculiar odor ; and substances taken into the stomach have been, we are assured, detected in their primitive state in the urine and other secretions. But are we assured from these facts that the substances mentioned, during the time of their assimilation and before their submission to the action of the secretory organs, retain the same state of combination among their elements, which obtained before their ingestion or application to the exterior surface of the body ? And even conceding the possibility of alcohol pervading the living body, with no greater resistance than that exerted by dead matter of equal porosity, would not its affinity for water everywhere present, induce a combination with it not to be reconciled with the opinion, which attributes to the general diffusion of alcohol the combustibility by which the body is characterized upon such occasions ? In proof, however, of the truth of the explanation, the spontaneous combustion of the eructations of certain drunkards has been adduced, with apparently too much confidence ol triumph by its advocates. For even in these instances it is evident that the alcohol must have submitted to important modifications of character by the action of the vital organs upon it—for the vapor of alcohol in its ordinary state is not susceptible of *spontaneous* combustion, like the gaseous eructations which have been noticed. This latter vapor must therefore possess combinations, if not elements, which are foreign to the nature of alcoholic fluids—combinations and elements which are only ascribable to the agency of the living organism. Nor does the foregoing opinion, which attributes the combustibility of the living body to the diffusion of alcohol through its substance, derive better support from the evidence supplied by cadaveric inspections; because in those instances in which alcohol has been taken in large quantities a short time before death, which cases have alone, as it would seem, given origin to this conjecture, could not in this manner have pervaded the living tissues, and must consequently have taken place after the body had ceased to be obedient to the laws which reign exclusively in directing the motions of vitalized matter. Besides, the bodies of drunkards generally do not exhale an alcoholic odor, a fact which has been abundantly established by the examination of many individuals of both sexes and different conditions, by able and practiced investigators. This odor is only found to be present in those cases in which large quantities of alcohol have been taken a short time before death, so that the powers of life were inadequate to its perfect assimilation, leaving it consequently unchanged in the stomach at the time of the cessation of the vital functions of this viscus. But spontaneous human combustion is a process of vitality, exhibited only by the living body, and never in one solitary instance after the body had ceased to be distinguished by the characters peculiar to life. This fact alone seems calculated to shade with great incertitude the explication alluded to, if it be not sufficient to its entire overthrow when examined in relation to all the bearings which it may legitimately claim to exercise in the discussion before us.

Finally, the similarity in the appearance of the flame in spontaneous human combustion to that of alcohol when ignited, contributes nothing more conclusive in support of this hypothesis; since the combustion of other bodies, such as carbureted and sulphureted hydrogen gas present also the same resemblance in the appearance of the flame. To these objections to the validity of the explication which has been noticed, it may be added with still greater force, that persons have in some instances, as in the case recently occurring in this city,* been the subject of spontaneous combustion, whose character was exempt from the slightest imputation in respect to the abusive use of strong drinks of any description.

With respect to the state of obesity or emaciation which has been proposed as the cause of the combustibility of the human body, it may be esteemed sufficient to remark, it is never so free from watery particles as to justify this hypothesis; and that the emaciation of no living or even dead body has ever presented so great dryness as to be capable of the rapid combustion which takes place when the body is the subject of the accident which is the present object of inquiry. Neither the dried mummies from the catacombs of Egypt, nor any condition of fatty matter with which we are yet acquainted, possess the character of combustibility to an extent nearly equal with that of the human living body, when it has acquired the capacity of spontaneous combustion. These causes are consequently totally inadequate to furnish a reasonable solution of the phenomenon of the spontaneous combustion which is the object of this essay. They may, indeed, be competent to modify the process, when it has been set up by other causes in the organism, but are entirely incompetent to account for its inception, progress, or the details of its character.

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* See Med. Journ. p. 25.

From an aggregation and comparison of the various cases of spontaneous combustion, which have at different times and situations been the subject of distinct and admitted observation, the following general conditions of its character are deemed to be fairly deducible.

1st. That females are much more subject to this accident than males; and we know that females have the skin and cellular tissue much more tender and relaxed than men, and that women more than men are the subjects of morbid obesity. 2d. That spontaneous combustion has much more frequently occurred to the aged than the young—much the greater number of cases having taken place in persons who had passed their sixtieth year of life. 3d. That besides the debility or asthenic diathesis peculiar to this portion of human life, these individuals had been in most, if not all instances, the subjects of asthenic diseases, or subjected to the agency of other causes productive of general debility. 4th. That their habits of life were inactive or indolent, and must consequently have tended towards the augmentation of the various other debilitating causes to which they had been exposed. 5th. That the greatest number of those who have been subject to this accident, have been fleshy or fat persons; and we know that obesity, and especially at a late period of life, is among the admitted proofs of atony, and particularly of atony of the lymphatic system. It is from this cause that such subjects are unusually liable to dropsy and to other affections of an asthenic nature, distinguished by the general appellation of cachexy, &c. 6th. That the largest number of those who have been the subjects of spontaneous combustion, have made an abusive use of spirituous drinks. 7th. That an ignited body, however inconsiderable may have been its extent or intensity, near to the place where the accident has occurred, such as a candle, lamp, burning coals, &c. &c., has in *most* instances been the object of clear and undisputed observation. 8th. That the inflammation has in all instances been extremely rapid, and in most cases has involved the whole body before assistance of any kind has been given to the sufferer. 9th. That the flame was in most instances where the subject was the object of observation, very unfixed or moveable, difficult to extinguish by means of water, and that it did not attack contiguous combustibles, except those with which it remained in contact for a considerable time. 10th. That the places where these combustions have occurred, emitted generally a strong empyreumatic odor; and that the walls of the apartment, and the surface of the ashes and coals which remained, were covered by a fœtid humidity and with grease. 11th. That the trunk of the body, with the exception of a few pieces of its ossific portion, has been, in almost all instances, entirely consumed by the conflagration; and that in the greater number of instances of total combustion, there remained only exempt from incineration after the termination of the process, portions of the bony structure of the head and extremities, of less or greater magnitude in different cases. 12th. And finally, that in a great majority of cases the accident has occurred when the atmosphere was considerably cold, and consequently in the winter season.

These facts are certainly of very great interest, and merit the profound meditation of every one who may attempt an explication of the subject of spontaneous combustion.

In the conduct of the present investigation we are early met by the inquiry, by what means does the human body acquire its combustibility or capacity of being burnt with the great rapidity exhibited in these accidents? The solution of this problem has been deemed of the first importance, yielding but little if at all, in consequence, to the inquiry which is directed in search of the causes, which acting upon the susceptibility thus acquired, may be said to be the immediate causes of the accident.

The human body, dead or living, is a material which, in its ordinary condition, does not burn without very considerable difficulty—it may, it has indeed with entire propriety, been arranged among those bodies which are called incombustible. Our astonishment is consequently the greater when we are obliged to witness its rapid and often almost entire incineration, by the process which engages our present notice. Its capability of becoming the subject of such a phenomenon, from these causes, upon the present occasion, is a subject for interesting and primary investigation. By the influence of what agency are we to account for the production of this strange condition of the living organism? This is the first, and perhaps the most important inquiry which obtrudes its early solution upon the attention of the investigator, occupied with an examination into the causes and character of spontaneous combustion. We are obliged to lament the insufficiency of any response heretofore given to this important interrogatory, which, still, after ages of research, vainly calls aloud for some replication more demonstrable and definite in its character. Upon this branch of our subject difficulties formidable and numerous rudely assail the inquirer from every quarter—difficulties with which our predecessors have but feebly contended, and which even now maintain their ground little reduced in force or number. This fact is ascribable, perhaps, in a great degree, to the actual state of medical science; every portion of whose extended domain has not been the object of equally assiduous and successful cultivation.

Little comparative attention seems to have been bestowed by the profession upon the anatomical structure, and physiological and morbid functions of the cutaneous system. It has hence been very truly remarked, that no diseases are less understood than those which constitute the pathology of the skin—when the anatomy of the skin, therefore, together with its functions, healthy and diseased, connected with the tissues in its immediate contiguity, shall become the objects of more diligent and successful investigation, we may reasonably anticipate the development of facts and principles which cannot fail to reflect valuable instruction upon a subject, which at present seems, by necessity, to be veiled in deep obscurity. This obscurity is the necessary result of a deficiency of facts; and this deficiency can only be supplied by future research, philosophically conducted, into the anatomy and functions of the skin and other superficial tissues, in connection with the phenomena of this particular malady. Spontaneous combustion of the human body has in all cases had its beginning upon the superficial tissues; and this locality of its inception corroborates the expectation that its pathology is to be sought for and obtained, only by diligent and skilful investigation concentrating its attention upon the skin and other superficial tissues of the body. Until this prerequisite task shall have been executed with necessary ability and exactitude, ingenuity may continue to supply us with an abundance of plausible speculation, but these can never assume the importance of ascertained facts, or supply any profitable rule for the regulation of practice. At best, they cannot be more than conjecture, and may often exercise a deprecated influence, by the substitution of their delusive instruction, in lieu of facts and induction logically deduced from the sources, and by the means we have already indicated.

This very desirable object, however, by many important circumstances in necessary connection with its nature, is removed far beyond our competency to accomplish. Leaving it therefore to the industry, talents and philanthropy of others, in all respects better qualified to embark in the laudable undertaking, with more animating hopes of ultimate success, I shall be content to submit such an explanation of this accident as has been deemed most satisfactory and consistent with its sensible phenomena.

[To be continued.]

HYDRIODATE OF POTASH IN RHEUMATISM.

Dr. Elliotson has employed this medicine with considerable advantage in several cases of chronic rheumatism. It was administered in the case of a young woman who caught cold about eighteen months since, and who from that time had suffered from rheumatic pains in the joints at the various changes in the weather. On her admission into the hospital, May 26th, she had pains in her loins, shoulders, wrists, and ankles; the joints were not swollen, or preternaturally hot or red. Her general health was pretty good. Two-and-a-half grains of the hydriodate of potash were given in solution three times a day.

30.—She has pain in the left side, increased on inspiration; she is obliged to lie on her back. Eight leeches are ordered to be applied.

June 2.—The pain in the side is better, and the pains in the limbs are gone. She complains of headache and a sense of sickness.

6.—The headache and sickness are gone, but the pains in the joints have returned.

23.—Since the last report she has been improving, the dose of the medicine having been gradually increased to seven and a half grains. The pains have now entirely left her, and she was ordered to be discharged.

The other case is that of an old woman, aged 66, who was admitted on May the 12th. Twelve months ago she slept in a bed the pillow of which was damp, and she has since suffered with a severe pain in her neck, shooting up to the ear and into the head. Her strength has been much reduced by the constant pain, which has continually disturbed her rest at night. She took three grains and a half of the hydriodate on her admission, and has had the dose gradually increased to ten grains, which she was taking three times a day just before her discharge. On the 23d of June she was very much relieved. There have been various local applications, such as iodine and croton oil, made to the neck, but the effects of none of them were so striking as to warrant the belief that they administered much to the cure. Dr. Elliotson certainly considered that the benefit might be mainly ascribed to the hydriodate of potash.

London Lancet.

MEDICAL TREATMENT IN SELF-LIMITED DISEASES.

[In former Nos. of the Journal, extracts from Dr. Bigelow's Discourse have been given, which treated of the inefficacy of the healing art in many of the diseases which the physician is called upon to attend. Injustice would perhaps be done to the author if the following extracts were not also presented to the readers of the Journal.]

It may perhaps appear that the views, which have now been taken of the power of medicine in so large a class of diseases, are gloomy and discouraging, and that an unworthy tribute is paid to the labors of those physicians, who have patiently studied, and ardently acted, for the benefit of humanity. Such views, however, are far from being the object of the present discourse. Were it permitted by the compass of the subject under consideration, it would be a very grateful task to enumerate those maladies of the human frame, over which we have reason to believe that medicine has obtained decisive influence. To a medical audience, it is unnecessary to recall the instances of pain relieved, spasms controlled, inflammations checked, and diseased associations broken up, under limitable diseases, by the agency of the healing art. Were there no other trophy for the medical profession to boast, it is sufficient to know, that the diseases of smallpox and syphilis alone would have entailed misery and extermination on a large portion of our species, had not medical science discovered the prevention of the one, and the successful management of the other.

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In regard to acknowledged self-limited diseases, the question will naturally arise, whether the practitioner is called on to do nothing for the benefit of his patient; whether he shall fold his hands, and look passively on the progress of a disease, which he cannot interrupt. To this I would answer,—by no means. The opportunities of doing good may be as great in these diseases as in any others; for, in treating every disease, there is a right method, and a wrong. In the first place we may save the patient from much harm, not only by forbearing ourselves to inflict him with unnecessary practice, but also by preventing the ill-judged activity of others. For the same reason that we would not suffer him to be shaken in his bed, when rest was considered necessary to him, we should not allow him to be tormented with useless and annoying applications in a disease of settled destiny. It should be remembered that all cases are susceptible of errors of commission, as well as of omission, and that by an excessive application of the means of art, we may frustrate the intentions of nature, when they are salutary, or embitter the approach of death when it is inevitable. What practitioner, I would ask, ever rendered a greater service to mankind, than Ambrose Paré, and his subsequent coadjutors, who introduced into modern surgery the art of healing by the first intention? These men with vast difficulty succeeded in convincing the profession, that instead of the old method of treating incised wounds by keeping them open with forcible and painful applications, it was better simply to place the parts securely in their natural situation, and then to let them alone.—In the second place, we may do much good by a palliative, and preventive course, by alleviating pain, procuring sleep, guarding the diet, regulating the alimentary canal,—in fine, by obviating such sufferings as admit of mitigation, and preventing or removing the causes of others, which are incidental, but not necessary, to the state of disease. In doing this, we must distinguish between the disease itself, and the accidents of the disease, for the latter often admit of relief, when the former do not. We should also inquire whether the original cause of the disease, or any accessory cause, is still operating, and if so, whether it can in any measure be prevented or removed: as, for example, when it exists in the habits of life of the patient, in the local atmosphere, or in the presence of any other deleterious agent. Lastly, by a just prognosis, founded on a correct view of the case, we may sustain the patient and his friends during the inevitable course of the disease; and may save them from the pangs of disappointed hope on the one side, or of unnecessary despondency on the other.

It will be seen that, in the foregoing remarks, a low estimate has been placed on the resources of art, when compared with those of nature. But I may be excused for doing this in the presence of an audience of educated men, and the members of a society whose motto is *Naturâ duce.* The longer and the more philosophically we contemplate this subject, the more obvious it will appear, that the physician is but the minister and servant of nature; that in cases like those which have been engaging our consideration, we can do little more than follow in the train of disease, and endeavor to aid nature in her salutary intentions, or to remove obstacles out of her path. How little, indeed, could we accomplish without her aid! It has been wisely observed by Sir Gilbert Blane, that "the benefit derivable to mankind at large, from artificial remedies, is so limited, that if a spontaneous principle of restoration had not existed, the human species would long ago have been extinct."

But if we can accomplish comparatively little in the actual direction of disease, the necessity becomes more imperative that we should do that little wisely, and well. The importance and usefulness of the medical profession, instead of being diminished, will always be elevated, exactly in proportion as it understands itself, weighs justly its own powers, and professes simply what it can accomplish. It is no derogation from the importance of our art, that we cannot always control the events of life and death, or even of health and sickness. The incompetency which we feel in this respect, is shared by almost every man upon whom the great responsibilities of society are devolved. The statesman cannot control the destinies of nations, nor the military commander the event of battles. The most eloquent pleader may fail to convice the judgment of his hearers, and the most skilful pilot may not be able to weather the storm. Yet it is not the less necessary, that responsible men should study deeply and understandingly the science of their respective vocations. It is not the less important, for the sake of those whose safety is, and always will be, committed to their charge, that they should look with unbiassed judgment upon the necessary results of inevitable causes. And while an earnest and inquiring solicitude should always be kept alive, in regard to the improvement of professional knowledge; it should never be forgotten, that knowledge has for its only just and lasting foundation, a rigid, impartial, and inflexible requisition of the truth.

RUPTURE, CONVULSIONS, AND DEATH.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

SIR,—Doubts have been entertained by the subscriber whether the following case, in its present imperfect state, would merit a place in the pages of your Journal. But on considering its nature, and the many valuable suggestions its premonitory symptoms and tragical termination furnish to the practising physician, for the prevention of a similar catastrophe, I have, after collecting all the facts relative to it that could, with propriety, be obtained, concluded to send you a brief history of it. If you think it sufficiently interesting, in the absence of all the important facts which a post-obit investigation would have enabled me to give, to justify you in presenting it to your readers, you are at liberty to do so.

CASE.—Mrs. B., of W., a highly respectable lady, about 30 years of age, was married eight years since, and though during this period she has enjoyed a good degree of health and has lived happily with her husband, she found herself pregnant last February for the first time. No remarkable change was caused by this occurrence, and her health remained unimpaired until August last. This, however, may be true but in part. From the commencement of uterine gestation she was troubled with flatulence, and a constant sense of uneasiness, with an undue distension of the epigastric region. But believing that such symptoms were usually experienced by women in her circumstances, she thought it unnecessary to apply for medical assistance, and by the advice of a friend took frequently portions of magnesiæ sulphas et pulvis rhei, which generally afforded her temporary relief. Towards the last of August these disagreeable sensations began rather to increase; and some time in the fore part of the present month, she found them so annoying that she was induced to resort to her family physician for advice. He gave her an anodyne tincture, informing her that in a few days he would call and abstract a quantity of blood, of which he was satisfied she had too much, and that the symptoms of her case strongly indicated the necessity of such a depletion. The tincture, like the salts, gave her but a brief respite from her sufferings. They were not, however, so severe as to prevent her from attending to her daily domestic concerns. She was more and more convinced, from the fulness of the veins and numbness of her arms and hands, which often caused her to let things fall, that the loss of blood her physician recommended was imperiously required. Many days passed away and her medical adviser did not call; yet she did not think herself ill enough to send for him.

On the 17th inst. the sense of fulness and distress at the pit of the stomach was greatly augmented. She, notwithstanding, attended during the day to her ordinary avocations, and took as usual her regular meals. In the evening the pain and distension at the epigastrium was so severe, that with the advice of her sister she took a mild aperient, which operated kindly but without giving any relief. She then called for some *soot tea*, thinking that an emetic might relieve her. After drinking plentifully of this, she soon began to vomit freely, but this gave no mitigation of the pain. Retching and vomiting continued for an hour or two, when suddenly she became incapable of utterance, and very soon after entirely insensible. In about twenty minutes after this, I saw her for the first time. She lay in a comatose state, with a hard and full pulse, giving about 90 strokes per minute, with a clean tongue, cadaverous countenance, stertorous* breathing, almost constant spasms of the arms, and her groans expressed intense suffering. Fresh blood was discovered in her mouth ; and a number of the last ejections from her stomach, the attendants assured me, were very red. This last circumstance, however, was not mentioned to me until after her death. On inquiry, I found that she was expecting to be confined in about a fortnight, and it was strongly suspected by some present that she then might be in labor. This led me to make an examination per vaginam. The os uteri was closed, and the head of the child forced up into the epigastric region. I then immediately took a pint of blood, which relieved her of the spasms, and reduced the circulation to about 75 pulsations in the minute. She became quiet, but remained to all appearance totally insensible. I applied hot stimulating applications to her feet, arms and chest, cold ones to her head, volatile alkali to her nose, and administered a strong stimulating antispasmodic infusion, with a saline enema—but all in vain. After remaining tranquil about one hour and a half, she had a violent general convulsion. I then took another small quantity of blood from her arm, and gave her an anodyne draught. Respiration became again laborious, and the spasms of the arms continued for about an hour, when they gradually left her, and after a short time, perhaps from three to five minutes, suddenly, without a struggle or a groan, she ceased to breathe. Soon after this abrupt and melancholy departure, blood flowed freely from her mouth and nose. I eagerly sought the privilege of making a post-mortem examination, to ascertain what veins were ruptured, and the precise cause of her death ; but the prejudices of her husband against such a procedure would not allow him to grant my request. This, undoubtedly, will prove to the profession a source of regret ; but the refusal was prompted by a feeling so sacred, that but few of the most ardent lovers of science could desire its violation. Yet every intelligent practitioner who reviews the symptoms of her case from the commencement to the termination of her difficulties, will, I think, have but one opinion, either in regard to the means that should have been employed for the relief of her complaint and the prevention of the fatal casualty, or to the proximate cause of her sudden and sorrowful exit. Respectfully yours,

Wrentham, Mass. Sept. 29th, 1835. L. W. Sherman.

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* The stertor was not like that produced by apoplexy or cerebral effusion, neither was it that which is vulgarly known by the name of *death rattle;* but it was something like stertor or a slight rattle with very laborious respiration.

Queries.—In the above case, what viscus, is it probable, was ruptured? Did the soot, independent of its active emetic property, have any agency in the destruction of life? Was the flatulence, with occasional acid eructations, and the sense of fulness in the epigastric region, which did not prevent her from taking her usual meals and attending as formerly to her daily avocations, sufficient evidence that there existed any very serious gastric affection? Could *new paint*, to which she was considerably exposed the day before her death, be the means of augmenting her difficulties? Had venesection been seasonably employed, would it have been likely to have afforded relief? Could emesis, in the surcharged state of the sanguineous system, with or without uterine contraction, be a prime cause of the rupture? If you, Mr. Editor, or some of your correspondents, will have the goodness to furnish an answer to the above interrogatories, it will at least oblige one. It may not be improper here to observe that the first ejections from the stomach, if I have been correctly informed, indicated a healthy state of that organ. The subsequent ones were probably colored with blood; though, as they were removed, I had no opportunity for examining them. It may also be added that the friends now regret that they did not allow me to satisfy my curiosity by autopsia. Yours, &c. L. W. S.

REMEDY FOR RINGWORM.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

Sir,—There is found on the 418th page of the 12th Vol. of your valuable Journal, an article under the title of Ringworm, in which you say that any practical suggestions on the treatment of that disease will be "regarded with interest." I have the satisfaction of being able to inform you of a remedy that has in two cases proved a speedy cure. The remedy to which I allude is the nitras argentum (nitrate of silver, or lunar caustic).

The first instance in which I used it was that of a young man of 17 years of age, who had one on his face before, and one under and behind his ear. They had been of a year's standing, and had resisted the use of ung. hydrarg. nitrat. fortius, gunpowder and vinegar, solution of corrosive sublimate, the juice of yellow dock, &c. I wet the skin on which the ringworm was situated, and a margin of sound or rather healthy skin, with water, and then rubbed a pencil of white lunar caustic over the ringworm and adjoining skin, until it began to be discolored and the patient experienced a smarting sensation. The skin was blistered, and a speedy cure was the result. The disease did not return.

The second was that of a girl of 5 or 6 years of age, who had a ringworm on the top of her head. The caustic was applied as before, and a cure effected without any blistering in a very few days.

When I was a boy, I cured a ringworm on my face by one application of the expressed juice of the yellow dock root. But this remedy has not always proved effectual. I once cured an herpetic eruption, resembling ringworm somewhat in its appearance, on the leg of an old man, with the expressed juice of green grapes. The eruption had been of more than a year's standing, and had resisted all the remedies I could devise, until I applied the grape juice. The remedy was continued for some weeks before the cure was wholly effected. It occupied the whole leg and ancle, and was very troublesome to the patient.

Very respectfully yours. WM. A. BREWSTER, M.D.
Hampton, Conn. October 3d, 1835.

BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL

BOSTON, OCTOBER 14, 1835.

EMPLOYMENT OF CREOSOTE.

IT is impossible not to be deeply interested in the frequent reports of European practitioners on the value of this newly-discovered medicinal agent. In our own medical publications, so little is said of it, that it is fair to infer that creosote has thus far had but a limited trial in this country, or, at least, has been prescribed with so much caution, that no one feels justified in either praising or condemning it on such slight acquaintance. From the strongly expressed testimony of very eminent transatlantic physicians, we are bound to regard it in the light of a powerful addition to the catalogue of remedies, and the sooner, therefore, its value becomes known to those who may have distrusted the accounts which have occasionally been republished from foreign journals, the more fortunate will it be for them and those who seek their saving advice.

All ulcerations are reported to be speedily and favorably influenced by the creosote. It will be readily acknowledged that, under some circumstances, they are the most difficult and hopeless of all things in surgery. It were almost needless to refer to scrofulous and sanious ulcers of the female breast, or to those superficial, ragged, marginally inflamed sores on the lower limbs of aged people, as examples, which sometimes wholly bid defiance to the best conducted course of treatment ; but even these, if the principle of health remains in the system, are reputed to yield to the prophylactic virtues of the creosote. Even in certain conditions of the body, where the tendency is to the reproduction of ulcers, showing themselves in new places very soon after their suppression in others, cases of which are doubtless familiar in every one's practice, they may be subdued by its internal administration.

Were no other uses found for the creosote, than those here slightly adverted to, it would rank as a valuable medicine. Its utility, however, is not bounded by these narrow limits ; yet its sphere cannot be defined with certainty in this infancy of our knowledge upon a subject of such apparent consequence to the future comfort and restoration of the afflicted. Within a few months, by a course of judicious observations in the North London Hospital, under the superintendence of Dr. Elliotson, some additional information has been gathered with regard to its efficacy in preventing vomition. This is another invaluable property. For ages it has been a desideratum to possess the power of obliging an irritable stomach to retain medicine. The evidence produced by the experiments seems to establish the fact, beyond a doubt, that a small quantity of creosote, prepared with mucilage, most effectually controls the organ, even when the nausea and disposition to vomit are extremely urgent. In colica pictonum, and obstinate constipation, besides a variety of inflammatory affections, where severe sickness of the stomach was an accompaniment, it invariably acted favorably, by soon allaying the retching, and thus preventing the rejection of other medicines. A small quantity, commingled with whatever potion is given, is recommended as a prudent course.

Enough, it is apparent, has been advanced from the best authority, to excite our particular attention ; and it cannot appear strange, therefore, if we urge upon our professional brethren their immediate attention to a medicine which promises so much. Not only are we solicitous to have it resorted to in the class of ills in which it has the reputation of being so remedial, but we are ambitious, also, for written opinions and observations, that there may be neither misapprehension nor misunderstanding, in respect either to doses or action, amongst our medical men. Every practical remark, calculated to guide the less experienced, embracing individual views of the real advantages of its use, based upon actual observation, is no less desirable to ourselves than to all the members of our profession and to the community at large.

The circumscribed boundaries to which the materia medica has been confined, or rather recommended to be restricted, by some modern theorists, would exclude many of the most efficient and powerfully effective remedial discoveries, simply because they have not antiquity in sufficient weight to recommend them to those who only estimate the value of a drug by its longevity. There is no danger of multiplying medicines ; yet the sooner very many articles which have had a respectable rank are totally abandoned, and indigenous medicinal plants are more critically analyzed and introduced in their places, the greater will be the triumphs of the healing art in America.

INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS.

Dr. Lombard, of Geneva, has lately instituted researches into the civil registers of that city, with a view to ascertain the age and profession of the individuals whose names are therein inscribed, from 1796 to 1830, and has published the result of his labors in the "Annales d'Hygeine Publique." The number whose ages and professions have been determined with perfect exactness, is 8488. The average duration of life for the whole was 55 years ; and taking this as the mean term, he divides professions into two classes—those in which the average of life is more than 55 years, and those in which it is less. The first class comprises a list of 79 professions, amongst which are placed the physicians ; the latter, 57, and includes surgeons.

From the extensive table which the author has drawn up to illustrate this point, we select a few examples :

Number of Deaths.	Professions.	Average Age.	Number of Deaths.	Professions.	Average Age.
71	Magistrates	68 1	41	Printers	54 3
275	Independent persons . .	65 8	77	Butchers	53 0
52	Protestant ministers . .	63 8	78	Coachmen	51 0
476	Merchants	62 0	82	Bakers	49 8
152	Goldsmiths	61 6	62	Locksmiths	47 2
1073	Watchmakers	55 3	65	Painters in varnish . . .	44 3
41	Surgeons	54 0			

This table, it will be seen, differs materially from others of a similar nature drawn up in different countries, and we are inclined to doubt whether any deductions can be drawn from such calculations, which will be of universal application. The difference between the average lives of mechanics and those at the head of the column, in the above table, is, if we are not greatly mistaken, larger than exists between such classes in the United States. The author considers a "comfortable income" a matter of the greatest importance in producing longevity—the difference between the rich and the poor being greater, in respect to the duration of life, than that between any two branches of professional or mechanical occupation. The difference between those, even, who work in the open air and those whose trade renders a sedentary life necessary, is only, according to the author's calculations, from 1 2-5 to 1 3-5 years ; while that between the liberal and industrious professions, is 4 3-5 years, and between the industrious and working classes, 2 4-5 years.

NEURALGIA OF THE UTERUS.

We have read the report of Mr. Bartleman on a case recently under his care, which yielded so readily to sulphate of quinine that the fact is of consequence, and should be treasured up as a valuable hint, inasmuch as neuralgic affections of that organ are doubtless more frequent than suspected, and often badly treated, from the simple circumstance that the true character of the disease is not suspected. One of the indications of its existence, is violent pain in the body of the uterus itself, occasionally darting down to the knees, accompanied by a slight tenderness over the region of the lower bowels, with pain also along the spine of the ilium. In the instance under consideration, Mr. B. ordered his patient to take *Sulph. Quininæ gr. iij. et Ext. Hyoscyami q. s. ft. pil.* every three hours, followed by an infusion of senna. Perhaps one of the most frequent predisposing causes of this condition of the uterine nerves, arises from partial eversions, and not, as has been intimated, from injections. Certain it is that the painful affection may also arise from extreme local debility ; but thus far, the indications of the character of the complaint have been uniformly the same, and it is hoped that the quinine may prove an unfailing specific.

Massachusetts Medical Society.—A regular meeting of the Counsellors was held at the Athenæum, in this city, on Wednesday last, the particulars of which will be given next week. Dr. R. Fowler, of Stockbridge, Berkshire county, was elected to deliver the annual discourse on the next anniversary of the Society, in place of Dr. Bugbee, of Wrentham, who has declined the honor, in consequence of a recent and severe domestic affliction.

Appeal from the Pulpit for the benefit of a public Charity.—In this republican country, whose charitable institutions cannot boast of any regal or titled patrons, but depend mainly for support upon the munificence and liberal spirit of men whose noblest titles to distinction spring from their benefactions and generous exertions to afford relief to the sufferings of their fellow creatures, it would appear somewhat indecorous, to say the least, to make an appeal from the pulpit in favor of any eleemosynary institution, however meritorious. It may not be amiss to state that the "Royal Dispensary" alluded to below, purports to be under the immediate patronage of "the King's most gracious Majesty, and his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland;" and for Vice Presidents having a list of some forty dukes, most noble and right honorables, and others of lower rank, with a sprinkling of church dignitaries and a few titled professional men. This *nobly* patronized institution, we are informed by a Report published by authority (of which we propose at some future time to present a more extended notice), is conducted by the Director and Surgeon, J. H. Curtis, Esq. M. R. I. Aurist to his Majesty. While on the subject of the appointment of boards of trustees or managers of public charities, we cannot refrain from expressing a wish, not of recent origin, that some portion of such boards might consist of medical men, the best, if not the only judges of the professional merits of their brethren and compeers.

But to return to the subject which has elicited these remarks, to wit:—"On Sunday morning a sermon was preached at St. George's, Hanover Square, by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, for the benefit of the Royal Dispensary for Diseases of the Ear and the Deaf and Dumb, Dean St., Soho Square. His Lordship stated that, since the establishment of the institution in 1816, upwards of 9,630 patients, afflicted with deafness and other diseases of the ear, had been cured or relieved, including several cases of deaf and dumb. The Rev. Prelate remarked, that though nature rarely errs in the perfection of her works, and that it is only in a few insular cases that a real structural deficiency in the organ of hearing exists, yet it is a remarkable fact, and indicative of the almost total neglect with which diseases of the ear have in general been treated, that in Europe alone there are upwards of 137,000 persons deaf and dumb; so that here is an additional evidence of the need there was for such an institution, and of the misery it may in future be the means of averting. After the sermon several children born deaf and dumb, who had obtained their hearing and speech at the Dispensary, attended in the vestry; among whom were two boys sent by order of the King; also, a young woman likewise born deaf and dumb, who readily answered every question put to her by the Bishop and others."

Sheet Lead as a Dressing for Wounds.—Reference is made in the medical periodicals to this mode of dressing ulcers and other wounds, for the purpose of promoting cicatrization. It was first proposed by M. Réveillé-Parise, and has been employed successfully by him and others. It is confined by a compress and bandage, or by strips of adhesive plaster. Its operation is intended to be purely mechanical, and it is said to be more simple, expeditious and comfortable than any other dressing.

New Remedy for Hypochondria.—In the materia medica of Hahnemann, Vol. I., page 315, he advises the *decillionth dilution of musk!* A sugar pellet the size of a mustard seed, moistened with the decillionth dilution of common table salt—or, as it would necessarily be expressed in figures, 1-000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000th part of a grain—communicates its medicinal virtues to the surrounding atmosphere, so that by the olfactory apparatus, diseases are subdued homœopathically!

DIED—In Gorham, Me. Jeremiah Barker, M.D. aged 81.

Whole number of deaths in Boston for the week ending Oct. 10, 40. Males, 23—Females, 17.

Of measles, 9—cholera infantum, 3—scarlet fever, 2—consumption. 5—infantile, 6—throat distemper, 2—delirium tremens, 2—cholera morbus, 1—croup, 2—mortification, 1—ulcer, 1—typhous fever, 1—inflammation of the bowels, 1—paralysis, 1—dropsy of the brain, 1—lung fever, 1—cramp in the stomach, 1.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

MEDICAL INSTRUCTION.

The subscribers are associated for the purpose of giving a complete course of Medical Instruction, and will receive pupils on the following terms:

The pupils will be admitted to the practice of the Massachusetts General Hospital, and will receive Clinical Lectures on the cases which they witness there.

Instruction, by examination or lectures, will be given in the intervals of the Public Lectures of the University.

On Midwifery, and the Diseases of Women and Children, and on Chemistry	By Dr. Channing.
On Physiology, Pathology, Therapeutics, and Materia Medica - - - -	By Dr. Ware.
On the Principles and Practice of Surgery - - - - - - - -	By Dr. Otis.
On Anatomy, Human and Comparative - - - - - - - - - -	By Dr. Lewis.

For the greater accommodation of the Class, a room is provided in the house of one of the instructers, having in it a large library, and furnished with lights and fuel, without charge to the students.

The Fees will be, for one year, $100. Six months, $50. Three months, $25.

The Fees are to be paid in advance. No credit will be given, except on sufficient security of some person in Boston, nor for a longer period than six months.

Applications are to be made to Dr. Walter Channing, Tremont Street, opposite the Tremont House, Boston. 6m.

WALTER CHANNING,
JOHN WARE,
Boston, April 1, 1835. GEORGE W. OTIS, Jr.
WINSLOW LEWIS, Jr

AN EXCELLENT CHANCE FOR A PHYSICIAN.

A Physician in one of the western counties of New Hampshire offers to sell his stand, situated in a pleasant and flourishing village, and no other physician within five miles. For further particulars, inquire of the Editor of this Journal, or of Dr. Richards, of Claremont, N. H. Oct 7

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL EDUCATION.

The subscriber continues to receive medical pupils at the United States Marine Hospital, Chelsea, and to offer them the following advantages.

The institution at present contains seventy beds: all of which are occupied during the autumn and winter by the subjects, both of medical and surgical treatment. The number of patients in the spring and summer is rather less. The average number daily, throughout the last year, was between fifty-five and sixty. The number is annually increasing. A greater variety of disease is thus presented, than is to be found in those hospitals exclusively appropriated to the poor of any city.

The students have unrestrained access to these cases during all hours: as also to the extensive apothecary shop connected with the establishment.

A valuable medical library is offered for their use.

Facilities for the cultivation of demonstrative anatomy, are afforded through the winter.

The students are provided with a suitable apartment in the hospital, which is furnished with fuel and lights, without charge.

Fees, $50 a year.

Board may be procured in the vicinity of the hospital, at from $2,50 to $3,00 per week.

Boston, April 21, 1835. (April 29.—tf.) C. H. STEDMAN.

A STAND FOR A PHYSICIAN.

A physician in the State of Maine, in a pleasantly situated, small, flourishing village, about 25 miles from Portland, wishes to dispose of his stand. Being a very eligible stand, and affording abundant practice, it offers a good opportunity for a physician to establish himself. For further particulars, apply to the Editor of the Journal; if by mail, post-paid. Sept 23—3m

WASHINGTON MEDICAL COLLEGE OF BALTIMORE.

The Annual course of Lectures in this Institution will commence on the last Monday of October.

James H. Miller, M.D. Professor of Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology.
Samuel K. Jennings, MD. Prof. Materia Medica, Therapeutics, Hygiene, and Medical Jurisprudence
William W. Handy, MD. Professor Obstetrics and the Diseases of Women and Children.
John C. S Moukur, MD. Professor Theory and Practice of Medicine.
John P. Mettauer, MD. Professor Surgery and Surgical Anatomy.
Edward Foreman, MD. Lecturer on Chemistry, &c.
Washington R. Handy, M.D. Demonstrator of Anatomy. This department will be open from the 1st of October. Sept 16—3t

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